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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: QATARI PREMIER LAUDS RELATIONS WITH U.S. IN AL-JAZEERA
INTERVIEW

(U) KEY POINTS

-- In a June 24 interview on Al Jazeera Arabic, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani discussed Qatar's sometimes complicated relationships with the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

-- The PM characterized Qatar's relationship with the U.S. as strategic despite obvious differences on some regional issues. He expressed high hope that the Obama administration is serious about moving forward on Middle East peace, noting that Qatar will re-open the Israeli commercial office in Doha once Israel improves the living condition of the Palestinians.

-- He described Saudi Arabia, and Qatar's relationship with it, in glowing terms, saying that misunderstandings between the two countries, including border disputes, have been resolved.

-- Gaza remains the center of Qatar's dispute with Egypt, and the PM dismissed speculation that Qatar demanded a leadership role in Gaza's rehabilitation.

(SBU) COMMENTS

-- The PM's explicit references to Qatar's alignment with the U.S. are notable. While recognizing differences of opinion, he spoke warmly of the Obama Administration and its actions to date, indicating publicly that Qatar would be receptive to U.S. efforts to deepen the bilateral political relationship.

-- The Premier's effusive treatment of Saudi Arabia testifies to the palpable improvement in Qatari-Saudi relations over the last year, beginning with the demarcation of the countries' disputed maritime border. Qatar has invested substantial effort in re-building its relationship with Saudi Arabia in the wake of tensions surrounding Al Jazeera's coverage of the Kingdom.

-- His critical remarks on Egypt stood in sharp contrast, suggesting that Qatar is in no rush to repair a relationship strained during the Gaza war.

End Key Points and Comments.

UNITED STATES

1. (U) Speaking in an extended interview on June 24 with Al Jazeera Arabic television, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani said that Qatar's relations with the U.S. are strategic. However, he said, "Let's be obvious ... there is a difference of views in some matters," and he noted that any policy disagreements are largely of a regional nature.

12. (U) The PM remarked that Qatar has high hope in the new Administration, especially after recent steps taken by President Obama. He said he believes that the Administration is serious in moving forward on Middle East peace and committed to resolving the Palestinian issue. The Premier declared that the U.S. is Qatar's friend, and Qatar is willing to help it.

ISRAEL

13. (U) The Premier briefly talked about Qatar's relations with Israel, noting that the Israeli commercial office in Doha, which was closed during the Gaza War, will be re-opened once Israel improves the living condition of the Palestinians. He also mentioned Qatari efforts to secure the release of Israeli prisoner Gilad Shalit.

SAUDI ARABIA

14. (U) The Prime Minister underlined that maintaining a good relationship with Saudi Arabia is important for Qatar and said he considered Saudi Arabia the backbone of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The PM lauded the wisdom of Qatari Amir Shaykh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani and King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia in ending the differences between the two countries.

15. (U) The Prime Minister said there had been misunderstandings between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on some views, but these matters have been resolved, and relations between the two countries are now

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excellent. The two sides had settled the maritime border dispute surrounding Khor Al Udeid, which had posed a huge obstacle to their relationship. He described Saudi-Qatari ties as strategic and "historic and distinguished," built on more than one hundred years of trust between the two ruling families and their two countries. Saudi Arabia, he added, is an important county in the region.

16. (U) Tensions between the two countries over Al-Jazeera are over-blown; he characterized them as a creation of the media. In any case, mutual bonds of love and interest in the stability of the region outweigh differences over Al Jazeera. The Prime Minister lauded King Abdullah's recent speech at the Kuwait Economic Summit. His sincerity in wanting to resolve Arab conflicts had a big effect on the gathering, he believed.

17. (U) Referring to the countries' Joint-Coordination Committee that was established in 2008 and is dedicated to the development of the bilateral relationship, the PM expressed the hope that the Qatari-Saudi relationship would progress from good to great.

EGYPT

18. (U) Responding to a question on Qatar being in conflict with Egypt, the Premier rejected the view that Qatar seeks conflicts with others and stated that "Qatar has no time to deal with any party in this way." Asked about accusations that Qatar participated in Hezbollah's sabotage campaign in Egypt, the Prime Minister said Qatar respects Egypt and the Egyptian people for their struggle over the years and their concerns about Arab issues. He added that Qatar respects President Mubarak for his work on Arab relations, remarking that Qatar's differences with Egypt are on "the Gaza issue."

19. (U) He said the allegations that Qatar was responsible for the 2007 Hamas coup in Gaza are ridiculous, remarking that the country "does not intervene in cases involving other countries." The Premier expressed surprise that Qatar has been associated with a plot by Hezbollah to destabilize Egypt, insisting that Qatar would not benefit from instability in Egypt. He went on to blame Egypt for the tensions in the relationship, implying that certain members of the government, though not President Mubarak himself, would

benefit from a deterioration in relations.

¶10. (U) The PM dismissed reports that Qatar demanded to host a meeting at the start of the year on rehabilitation in Gaza, saying that Qatar was merely calling for coordination among GCC countries on the reconstruction effort. He stressed that any funds they collect for this purpose must be provided directly to those affected.

LEBARON